

**What is hand, foot and mouth disease?**

Hand, foot and mouth disease is a mild viral illness that can occur at any age, occurring most often in children younger than 10. The disease is characterized by vesicles (small blisters that contain clear fluid) inside the mouth, on the gums and on the side of the tongue. On rare occasions, people with the virus that causes hand, foot and mouth disease may develop viral meningitis. Infants who develop blisters in the mouth may stop nursing and become dehydrated. Most cases of hand, foot and mouth disease occur in summer and fall.

Who is at risk for hand, foot and mouth disease?

Everyone is at risk for hand, foot and mouth disease, but it usually occurs in children younger than 10. Not everyone who is infected becomes ill.

What are the symptoms of hand, foot and mouth disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease begins with a sore throat and a mild fever that can last from one to three days. Blisters form on the inside of the mouth, usually on the cheek, gums and the side of the tongue. Blisters later appear on the feet and the hands and occasionally on the buttocks and may persist for seven to 10 days.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear three to six days after exposure.

How is hand, foot and mouth disease spread?

The disease is spread by contact with nose and throat discharges and feces of infected people.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

A person with hand, foot and mouth disease can transmit the virus through nose and throat discharges and feces during the acute stage of the illness. The virus can continue to be transmitted in the feces perhaps as long as several weeks after the onset of infection when a person has no apparent illness.

How is a person diagnosed?

A health-care provider can diagnose hand, foot and mouth disease. Laboratory tests usually are not needed to diagnose hand, foot and mouth disease.

What is the treatment?

Hand, foot and mouth disease does not require treatment. People with the disease should rest and may be given medication and liquids to control fever and pain associated with the disease.

Does past infection make a person immune?

Immunity to the specific virus type probably is acquired after infection; however, the duration of the immunity is unknown. Current immunity to one type of virus will not prevent infection from a different virus type.

Should children or others be excluded from day care, school, work or other activities if they have hand, foot and mouth disease?

Children do not need to be excluded unless the child is unable to participate and the staff believes they cannot care for the child without compromising the ability to care for other children. Adults do not need to stay home from work if they feel well enough to conduct their normal activities.

What can be done to prevent the spread of hand, foot and mouth disease?

Particular attention should be given to thorough hand washing following contact with nose and throat discharges and feces.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available at www.ndhealth.gov/disease or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

Adapted from the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services

